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Capitol Hill Housing to Develop Seattle's First LGBTQ-Affirming Affordable Senior Housing

CHH hosting Sept 21st event to help identify community needs and priorities

Seattle, WA — Capitol Hill Housing (CHH) today announced plans to develop Seattle's first affordable senior housing development designed to be an affirming environment for LGBTQ elders and the greater LGBTQ community.

The project comes at a pivotal time. King County's elderly LGBTQ population is expected to double by 2030, and LGBTQ seniors are listed as a priority population for the Seattle Housing Levy as they face demonstrated health, economic, and social disparities compared to their peers.

CHH is planning to create a mixed-use building on 14th and Union on Capitol Hill, redeveloping a parking lot adjacent to the Helen V Apartments. The Helen V is a 38-unit building that CHH has owned for 16 years, and which serves low-income seniors and individuals with permanent disabilities. The project would include renovations to the existing Helen V apartments, but would not displace any current tenants.

The initial concept calls for a building that will be between five and seven stories and have between 44 and 66 apartments. The final height and unit count of the building will depend on the outcome of the city's zoning changes under the Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) program. Apartments would be affordable to low-income seniors 55 years or older. Anyone meeting age and income qualifications would be eligible to live in the building. The first floor will include just under 4,000 square feet of commercial space for local businesses or community organizations.

CHH is in the early stages of engaging the community to solicit input on how to create a welcoming space for the neighborhood, including partnerships and programming that could support LGBTQ elders and make the building a hub for the LGBTQ community.

"As a community-based organization with deep roots on Capitol Hill, we're proud to bring this project to the neighborhood," said Christopher Persons, CEO of CHH. "It all starts with bringing folks to the table and setting a shared vision."

CHH has hosted initial meetings with an informal advisory committee, which includes over a dozen leaders from community organizations and government entities including Bailey-Boushay House, City of Seattle, Entre Hermanos, Gay City, Generations Aging with Pride, King County HIV/AIDS Planning Council, LGBTQ Allyship, Lifelong, POCAAN (formerly known as People of Color Against AIDS Network),

Seattle Counseling Services, Seattle Foundation and Virginia Mason Hospital. CHH is working with the advisory committee to explore how design, social support and health interventions can be leveraged in the project to support LGBTQ elders.

“Affordable housing is essential,” said Fred Swanson, Executive Director of Gay City. “But this project also offers the opportunity to bring the whole community together to think creatively about how to support the needs of LGBTQ elders in the community.”

A survey of over 200 LGBTQ older adults in King County conducted by Professor Karen Fredriksen-Goldsen at the University of Washington School of Social Work, one of the nation’s leading researchers on LGBTQ aging, found that 45% of respondents live alone and are at high risk of social isolation. Over one quarter live below 200% of the federal poverty line. Cities such as San Francisco, New York, Houston, Philadelphia and San Diego all have affordable housing affirming of LGBTQ elders, but Seattle, despite its long history of LGBTQ advocacy and acceptance, has yet to develop any.

“LGBTQ individuals face a host of challenges, which can get magnified as they age,” said Fredriksen-Goldsen, who also serves as Board Co-Chair of Seattle’s Generations Aging with Pride. “An affordable and affirming place to live can address the isolation, discrimination and health challenges LGBTQ older adults often face.”

As part of a growing process of community engagement, CHH is hosting a gathering at Gay City’s Calamus Auditorium on Capitol Hill on September 21st from 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM. The event will feature more information and conversation about the project, art, music and a presentation of initial interviews conducted with LGBTQ seniors.

Many interviewees have expressed hope that the project could help bolster Capitol Hill’s LGBTQ identity. “There was a time when Capitol Hill was the gay mecca. And there are a lot of people who are decrying that it’s becoming more gentrified and more mainstream. But I think with people of our age it remains a gay city,” said Dan Edminster, a longtime Capitol Hill resident and interviewee.

The total development cost of the project is anticipated to be \$25 million. This project will be financed with Low Income Housing Tax Credits, public funds and bank financing. Timing of the development will not be confirmed until all financing is secured. CHH has an agreement with Environmental Works to serve as architect for the project.

About Capitol Hill Housing

Since 1976, Capitol Hill Housing has worked alongside the community to build and preserve apartments affordable to working families and promote the qualities that make Seattle a vibrant and engaged city. Today, we provide secure, affordable homes to over 2,200 of our neighbors in 48 buildings across the city while working to make our neighborhoods safer, healthier and more equitable through the Capitol Hill EcoDistrict. Learn more at capitolhillhousing.org.

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